



DEPARTMENT FOR THE AGING

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Edwin Méndez-Santiago, LCSW
Commissioner

SENIOR ADVISORY COUNCIL MEETING

Thursday, September 4, 2008
220 Church Street, Room #328
9:30 a.m. - 12:00 p.m.

MINUTES

Members Present:

Michael Adams, Dr. Philip Brickner, Suleika Cabrera-Drinane, Jerry C. Chiapetta, Carol Dunn, Claire Hall, Evelyn Laureano, Bertha R. Mandel, Joyce Matthews-Paul, Mary Mayer, Benjamin Pan, Marcia Stein, Eartha Thompson-Washington, Leonora Vaccaro, Louis Vasquez, Rabbi Moshe Wiener, Doris Williams

Members Absent:

Suzannah Chandler, Doris Colón, Cynthia E. Dial, Rose Dobrof, Fatima Goldman, Katherine Martinez, Cao K. O, Raymond Raimundi, Stacy Shuchter-Gomez, Marjorie Tiven

DFTA Staff Members Present:

Verna Arthur, Miriam Fisher, Edwin Méndez-Santiago

The Chairperson, Dr. Phillip Brickner, called the meeting to order at 9:30 a.m.

Administrative Matters

The Advisory Council's by-laws were reviewed, discussed and approved by the members.

The members then discussed the need to appoint a new Vice-Chairperson. (That position had been held by the late Teresa Moore.) Possible candidates for this position will be discussed at the next meeting.

The Advisory Council should have 31 members and currently has several vacancies. The Commissioner explained that the appointment process takes time and involves getting approval of every candidate from City Hall.

- **COMMISSIONER'S REPORT:**

Modernization

The Commissioner spoke about the Department's effort to modernize its three core services - home-delivered meals, case management and senior centers. He stated that the service delivery system had not been updated in many years. Further, based on national trends, he noted that New York City is not alone in working on modernizing its services for older adults.

The Commissioner stated that the modernization effort has been a collaborative and consultative process. DFTA has conducted over 180 meetings with the community and elected officials to discuss modernization. Concept papers were issued prior to the release of the RFPs so that anyone in the community could see DFTA's thinking and provide input prior to the drafting of the RFPs. City Hall strongly supports modernization. The Commissioner suggested that anyone interested in learning more about modernization would find the DFTA website to be a good resource (www.aging.nyc.gov).

Home-delivered meals

The Commissioner reminded the members that modernization had started with the modernization of home-delivered meals in the Bronx with the "Senior Options" program. The Bronx had been particularly appropriate for the pilot project because every senior in the Bronx had a case manager whereas in other boroughs, meals were "turned on" by persons other than case managers, so that clients were not getting the benefit of a comprehensive assessment for other services for which they might be entitled. Despite initial resistance from elected officials and others, "Senior Options" got up and running and is working smoothly and most importantly, seniors are happy with it.

The Commissioner stated that proposals submitted in response to the home-delivered meals RFP are being reviewed and scored by independent committees consisting of three readers. Award letters will be mailed in September. The rollout of the new meals contracts will be staggered. The Bronx and Staten Island will start in January, Queens will begin in February, Manhattan in March and Brooklyn in April.

The Commissioner reminded the members that frozen meals are still "optional". Any client who does not want frozen meals does not have to take them. Those who do want frozen meals will be assessed and a determination will be made as to whether they are able to handle that type of meal, have the mental and physical capacity to re-heat the meal and the freezer space.

A member of the Advisory Council asked what happens when a person receiving home-delivered meals gives a cash donation in an envelope to the driver. How do they know where the money goes?

The Commissioner responded that the money should be going to the provider to re-invest in the home-delivered meals program, but acknowledged that the system is potentially open to abuse. He explained that while checks would be safer, many meals recipients are not willing or able to write checks. He further explained the requirement under state and federal law that meals recipients be given an opportunity to contribute.

Case management

The Commissioner stated that old case management programs officially closed on June 30, 2008 and the new case management programs began July 1, 2008 after a three month transition period. These programs are all up and running. The Commissioner stated that the Case Management agencies overall received an additional 36% to the overall funding, unfortunately DFTA is not able to provide funding for additional permanent staff, though temporary assistance is being provided to many of the new agencies.

Evelyn Laureano stated that there were discrepancies between what was described in the case management RFP and what case management agencies were actually expected to do. She stated that not all the work could be done within the time frame required.

The Commissioner responded that communication between DFTA and the case management agencies must be improved. Cluster meetings with the agencies and the department are being held regularly to improve communication and the Commissioner has begun to attend those meetings. The case management agencies must consider each individual case and prioritize them. Some clients will only need to be seen yearly while others need more attention. In addition, the Commissioner stated that it was likely that some clients have case management issues that should be referred to HRA or other agencies.

Senior center RFP

The senior center RFP is the most controversial area for modernization. The Commissioner explained that DFTA's aim is to have each center be well attended, and that the focus of the activities should be wellness and health. The RFP for senior centers should be released in October. (*Editor's note: It was released November 3rd*) The proposals are due in January of 2009. Small organizations can compete in this RFP process. The intention is not to close centers. With funding from the United Way the umbrella organizations spearheaded by UJA-Federation of Jewish Philanthropies have agreed to do training on the RFP process for would-be proposers. DFTA is not permitted to conduct this type of training as it would be a conflict of interest.

Budget Issues

The Commissioner noted that the New York City Housing Authority (NYCHA) had been paying nearly \$30 million to the City for the DFTA senior center programs in its developments – 101 centers and seven NORCS. He discussed NYCHA's financial difficulties and its deficit of over \$90 million. NYCHA has indicated they can no longer pay for the senior center programs. The Commissioner stated it was unclear how this loss of funding would be dealt with, but every effort is being made to favorably resolve this issue.

Meanwhile, Governor Patterson has to make cuts in the State's budget. Thus far, DFTA will be getting 6% less in State dollars. The cost of living allowance for employees has thus far been kept safe from being cut. There are many issues to resolve and the losses on Wall Street will continue to impact funding from the State and the City. Hopefully DFTA will be able to make better use of federal funding – for example, under a Medicaid Waiver, DFTA might be able to reimburse some expenses by Medicaid. The use of volunteers may become even more important at this time as well as programs such as Re-serve.

Other Matters:

The Annual Plan Public Hearings for the five boroughs are scheduled for various dates in October, a listing of which can be found on the DFTA web site. The Commissioner encouraged the Advisory Board members to attend and to remind seniors in their communities to participate and testify. All Public Hearing testimony and responses to the testimony are posted on the agency's web site.

The Commissioner noted that the State Office of Aging was reviewing DFTA's submissions for the Annual Implementation Plan and that DFTA was awaiting their response.

The Alzheimer's Conference will be held at the Brooklyn Marriott, on October 31st.

The Department has a new initiative with the New York Public Library. This collaborative effort will encourage senior centers to bring library staff to their centers to conduct special programs and also to bring seniors to the library to participate in special events as well as enjoy the resources the libraries have to offer.

The meeting was adjourned at 12:00.